British Universities & Colleges Sport (BUCS)

Race and Equality Football Workforce Research

Research Report prepared by the

The Centre for Social Justice in Sport and Society

Leeds Beckett University

In partnership with the

The Centre for Sports Coaching

Leeds Beckett University

Supported by **Sporting Equals**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research Overview:

This research project, commissioned by BUCS and undertaken by the Centre for Social Justice in Sport and Society at Leeds Beckett University, was designed to respond to the recognition that volunteers from diverse ethnic backgrounds are underrepresented within university football, and as participants in BUCS football leadership programmes.

The project sought to understand how football clubs, universities, and BUCS can contribute to enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in volunteering by producing insight to:

- Understand who is engaged and not engaged in university football volunteering.
- Gain insight into the football volunteer experience.
- Identify the contextual conditions that enable or constrain volunteer engagement.

Research Methods:

Three phases of research were conducted to address the research aims. Firstly, an online, quantitative survey was completed by 101 students who were currently engaging, or non-engaging, in university football volunteering, to identify volunteer characteristics, and motivations and barriers to volunteering. Secondly, underpinned by a participatory research approach, three peer-led focus group interviews were held with 12 students from diverse ethnicities to explore their perceptions and experiences of university football volunteering. Lastly, 13 university staff with responsibility for volunteering and leadership from five institutions (varying by football offer, student population, degree course profile, and geographic location) took part in interviews to discuss good practice and challenges in relation to institutional approaches to diversity and inclusion in football volunteering.

Summary of Research Findings:

Quantitative insights from the university football workforce survey:

- The survey was successful in reaching students from diverse ethnicities (36% of participants) and students either *not* engaged in football volunteering or engaged in volunteering outside of university (50% of participants).
- For students engaged in university volunteering, 75% of diverse students and 71% of White British students also volunteered in organised football outside of university, indicating that regardless of ethnicity, when students engage in leadership and volunteering for a university football programme, they are also highly likely to volunteer in football within their community too.

- 100% of student volunteers from diverse ethnicities, and 92.8% of White British students, indicated that they play football within or outside of university, reinforcing the link between a positive, welcoming participation football offer and engagement in volunteering opportunities.
- For students not engaged in university football volunteering, those from diverse ethnic backgrounds rated institutional, social, and ethnicity barriers higher than White British students. Specifically, this suggests that students from diverse ethnicities may be less likely to volunteer if: they perceive a lack of opportunity and support to volunteer at university; their friends or family do not volunteer; they feel they are treated differently because of their ethnicity; or because they do not see people who look like them volunteering.

Qualitative insights from student-led focus group interviews:

- **Inspiring volunteers:** Football club culture (e.g., lack of ethnic diversity within the club membership, social programmes that promote alcohol, limited understanding of personal and cultural beliefs from others) contributed to additional emotional work and barriers to engagement for potential volunteers.
- **Recruiting volunteers:** Students from diverse ethnicities were motivated to volunteer in university football but did not know where to access relevant information or felt that opportunities did not apply to them. Students who were active volunteers emphasised the importance of social networks and peer encouragement to apply for roles in football.
- **Supporting volunteers:** Students involved in football leadership positions experienced support from peers for volunteering, but not always from family. Active volunteers described the importance of mentors and role models in football, but highlighted difficulties in accessing effective mentoring support.
- **Retaining volunteers:** Students did not perceive that diversity in the football workforce was in direct response to an organisational university strategy, policy, or practice; more that it occurred randomly. Volunteers valued the opportunity that the interview presented to meaningfully discuss the lack of diversity within their club.

Qualitative insights from the university stakeholder interviews:

- **Institutional approaches to diversity and inclusion in volunteering:** While institutions made strategic commitments to inclusion and diversity in the football workforce, and staff valued and recognised the importance of this work, there was a lack of clarity regarding how to achieve this in practice. Specifically, there was uncertainty as to who was responsible for delivering this agenda, scant knowledge of club membership demographics and how inclusive current volunteering programmes

were, and little evidence of critical reflection upon recruitment practices perceived to be meritocratic and open to all.

- **Contextual barriers and enablers to engaging diverse students in volunteering:** The institutional resources (financial, human, and physical) allocated to volunteering and leadership programmes was a significant factor in the perceived success at engaging students from diverse backgrounds. Other variables including student population, suite of degree programmes offered, and campus design and location were also seen to affect the ease of which volunteers from diverse ethnicities could be recruited.

- **Perception of the skills and qualities needed to volunteer:** Staff expectations of what makes a 'good' volunteer (e.g., students who take the initiative to seek out opportunities, demonstrate communication skills and confidence, and possess certain qualifications) may unintendedly privilege home-based White British students. This also risks positioning the underrepresentation of diverse students in volunteering within individuals, rather than inequitable systems and practices.

Throughout the findings of this report, we offer questions for football clubs and university staff to reflect upon their current volunteering offer, in relation to the following process for implementing positive change towards a diverse and inclusive football workforce offer:

Process for Implementing Diversity and Inclusion Changes in Football Volunteering:
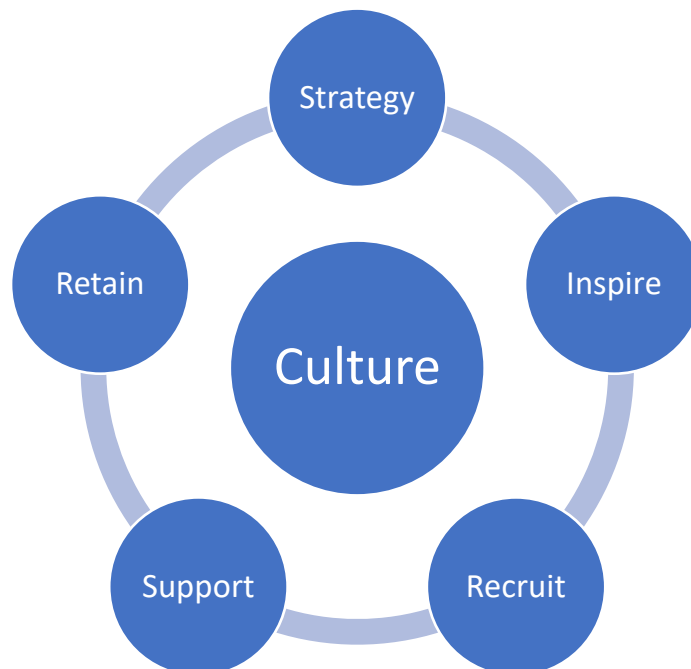
This model proposes that football clubs and institutions should aim to develop an equitable and inclusive culture, which priorities diversity. To promote this culture, clubs and institutions must first assess and develop their current equality, diversity, and inclusion insight and strategies, before implementing deliberate practices in relation to inspiring,

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recruiting, supporting, and retaining volunteers. Importantly, this should be viewed as an ongoing process of reflection, evaluation, and implementation – making incremental but meaningful changes to ensure leadership and volunteering opportunities are accessible, inclusive, and impactful for a diverse range of students.

Key Recommendations:

Based on the insight produced from the three phases of research, and aligned to our process for change model above, key recommendations for enhancing diverse and inclusive leadership and volunteering in university football are provided. These encompass guidance for clubs to develop action plans, and advice for how universities can support clubs and volunteers through changes to strategy, resources, and practices. The table below presents the headline recommendations and are supported by detailed, practical examples of how these could be implemented in practice – accounting for differences in context – in section 6.0 of this report.

Summary of Key Recommendations for Diverse and Inclusive University Football Leadership and Volunteering Programmes:

FEATURE OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL LEADERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMMES
STRATEGY – Analyse your club's current situation and create an action plan for enhancing inclusive leadership and volunteering in university football.	
INSIGHT	Analyse your club's current volunteering engagement and experience.
ACTION PLAN	Create an action plan for enhancing inclusive leadership and volunteering in university football.
RESPONSIBILITY	Embed responsibility for diversity, equity, and inclusion into the job roles of all paid and volunteer workforce, to support implementation of clubs' action plans.
INSPIRE – Take steps to ensure your football club culture is open, diverse, and inclusive. Volunteers feel welcome and inspired to become involved.	
PARTICIPATION OFFER	Take active steps to welcome new players from different backgrounds into your club, to diversify the player and potential volunteer base.
	Offer an initial experience that is welcoming, enjoyable, and respectful of diverse volunteers' needs and preferences.

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RECRUIT – Actively seek to recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds by establishing recruitment practices that are accessible and inclusive.	
ADVERTISING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES	Produce club information about volunteering opportunities that is accessible and relatable.
PROACTIVE VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT	Actively seek to include students from historically underrepresented groups within football volunteering.
APPOINTING VOLUNTEERS	Ensure recruitment processes and practices value different skillsets and routes into volunteering.
	Support students from diverse ethnicities to be represented in decision making roles.
SUPPORT – Support existing volunteer role models to develop relevant skills, experience, and networks.	
NETWORKING AND MENTORING	Support diverse volunteers to broaden social networks and access mentoring opportunities.
SKILL DEVELOPMENT	Support existing volunteer role models to build relevant skills and experience.
RETAIN – Establish ways to regularly check in with volunteers. Volunteers stay committed to your football club, and feel valued, supported, and heard.	
VOLUNTEER VOICE	Regularly seek and respond to feedback from diverse volunteers, through formal and informal communication.
VOLUNTEER PROGRESSION	Provide volunteers from diverse backgrounds with opportunities to progress within university football.

Research Conclusions:

We conclude this report by outlining some potential next steps that BUCS can prioritise to ensure that the membership can be supported to develop their approach to enhancing diversity in university football volunteering. These encompass promoting knowledge exchange, allocating resource to support members, and conducting further research to build upon the insight generated from this initial study.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to BUCS for commissioning this research and especially to Dan Matthews for his openness and support throughout the process.

We extend our sincerest thanks to all the university students and staff who generously gave their time to participate in the survey, focus groups, or interviews, and to the universities that leant us, and this important area of work, their support.

Thank you to Sporting Equals for providing invaluable feedback on the research design.

And a special thanks to our team of highly professional and conscientious co-researchers Tasneem, Numair, and Hina.

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1. THE PROJECT

1. 1 Research Context

1.1.1 Inequalities in access to sport volunteering.

Volunteers are a crucial part of the sporting workforce, often dedicating substantial time and personal resources to enable others to take part in sport. Engaging in leadership and volunteering in sport has been shown to contribute to enhanced wellbeing, confidence, and sense of community[1,2,3]. However, these benefits are not being made available and realised by all. As data from the *Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport Report* (May 2021)[4] indicates, people from diverse ethnicities[1] continue to be underrepresented in sport as both participants and volunteers.

Research has brought attention to how volunteers from historically marginalised groups may experience inclusion, or exclusion, within sport settings[5][6][7]. Volunteers can experience a multitude of challenges, including, but not limited to: **individual barriers** (e.g., pressure to exceed role expectations to be recognised, additional responsibility arising from being the lone voice on matters of diversity); **inter-personal barriers** (e.g., lack of access to mentors or role models, the perception that who you know is more important than what you know to progress); and **organisational barriers** (e.g., diversity work championed by a few committed individuals rather than embedded into organisations, encountering stereotyping or implicit bias). Therefore, it is timely to understand how to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in particular sport volunteering settings, such as university football, through:

- Understanding who is engaged and not engaged in volunteering.
- Gaining insight into the volunteer experience.
- Identifying the conditions that enable or constrain engagement in volunteering.

1.1.2 Sport volunteering in university.

Higher Education (HE) student populations are becoming more diverse, yet not all students will see themselves represented on university campuses or within the curriculum, nor have access to social networks that can facilitate an effective transition to university[8]. Participating and volunteering in university football can offer opportunities for students to build a sense of community, develop peer relationships, enhance employability, and for diverse experiences to be recognised and valued – when an inclusive workforce offer is

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[1] Throughout this report, we use the term 'diverse' when talking about people from non-white backgrounds. We recognise the importance of language, and so choose to use this term over 'minoritised ethnic backgrounds' (as the term 'minority' itself carries a negative connotation) or acronyms such as 'BAME' (which implies a single, shared experience across a range of people). For more information, please see Sporting Equals Terminology Statement.

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provided[9]. However, little is known about how students from diverse ethnicities experience football volunteering, nor the conditions that enable volunteers to feel included.

Furthermore, there is a need to examine the type of football workforce roles that students engage in. A closer look at national data regarding the type of role (formal or informal[10]) and sport context (competitive sports club or recreational community group) in which people volunteer, reveals racial disparities. For example, when coaching is defined as including 'helpers' within informal sport and physical activity settings, inequalities between different ethnic groups reduce[11]. This suggests that volunteers from diverse ethnicities may be marginalised from formal decision-making roles. Therefore, it is worthwhile exploring how existing systems to recruit, support, and retain volunteers may work to serve some students, but not others.

In summary, this research responds to recent calls to understand the "lived experience of people from ethnically diverse backgrounds who volunteer, who have been lost to volunteering, or who have never had the opportunity to volunteer in sport"[1]; and examine the "contextual story around volunteering"[2] – the conditions that enable or constrain diverse students' football volunteering engagement and development.

1.2 Research Aims

The aims of the research project were to:

1. Explore the current engagement in football specific leadership and volunteer opportunities of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds.
2. Understand the experiences of the identified students throughout their HE journey with regards to leadership and volunteering opportunities.
3. Identify and understand barriers to sustained engagement and participation in leadership and volunteering roles and opportunities across HE environments.
4. Understand mechanisms underpinning good practice in the engagement and development of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds.
5. Identify the gaps in provision and highlight recommendations to inform the development of future football development workforce initiatives.

1.3 Report Structure

This report presents insight in relation to the project aims through the following sections:

Section 2.0 describes the methodological approach, data collection, and analysis tools that were employed within this research to produce the findings and recommendations.

Section 3.0 presents quantitative insight into the university football volunteer workforce, highlighting what we know about students who engage in leadership and volunteering in

university football, and the barriers experienced by students who do not currently engage in football volunteering.

Section 4.0 presents qualitative insight into the experiences of students from diverse ethnicities both engaged, and not engaged in university football volunteering. This section reports findings from peer-led focus group interviews in relation to how university football programmes inspire, recruit, support and retain volunteers.

Section 5.0 presents qualitative insight into institutional approaches to diversity and inclusion in football volunteering, through sharing findings from interviews with university stakeholders with responsibility for volunteering and leadership in different contexts.

Section 6.0 details the recommendations for diverse and inclusive leadership and volunteering football programmes arising from this research. Examples of practical actions that clubs and institutions can make towards this goal are provided.

Section 7.0 concludes this report by outlining the next steps that BUCS can prioritise to build on the insight this research has produced, and to support football clubs and institutions in implement action plans for enhancing the diversity and inclusivity of leadership and volunteering in university football.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Approach

Our methodology was driven by the following guiding principles which were key to understanding the complexities of race and equality within student leadership and volunteering:

1. **Centring of student voice**. We sought to engage and respond to student perspectives and experiences throughout the research process.
2. **Valuing difference**. We respected the intersectionality of student identities and recognised that experiences differ across and within ethnic groups.
3. **Recognising the role of context and culture**. We examined the conditions that enabled or constrained student engagement in football leadership and volunteering.

2.2 Data Collection

Three phases of data collection were completed to address the research aims and provide recommendations to inform the development of future football development workforce initiatives. Ethical approval for the research was applied for and confirmed through Leeds Beckett University's ethical research process.

2.2.1 University football leadership and volunteering survey.

An online, quantitative survey was designed to capture the experiences of students with an interest in football who were currently engaging, or non-engaging, in university football volunteering. This ran from April 2022 to May 2022. This survey was shared through online platforms, as well as disseminated among university athletic departments and football clubs. It was completed by 101 participants. The survey questions, and subsequent descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, provided insight into six areas of volunteer characteristics.

- Personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, faith).
- Student characteristics (e.g., institution, degree programme, year of study).
- Football playing experience (within and outside of university).
- Leadership/volunteering engagement (role type, frequency, duration, context).
- Motivations for volunteering (using the Volunteer Functions Inventory[12]).
- Barriers towards volunteering (using the Barriers to Volunteering for Potentially Disadvantaged Groups review[13]).

2.2.2 Student-led focus group interviews.

2.2.2.1 Participatory research approach.

For this phase of the project, we adopted a participatory research approach that involved engaging students from diverse ethnicities in the design, data collection, data analysis, and dissemination stages of the research process[14]. From the outset, Naadrah Hafeez joined the research advisory group and provided feedback and contributed to decisions regarding the design of the research. Next, through personal contacts and through the survey (where respondents could identify if they were interested in taking part in the next phase of the research), three students, from different universities – Tasneem Amijee, Numair Khan, and Hina Shafi – were recruited and trained to become co-researchers.

The decision to employ a participatory approach was important for several reasons. First, engaging students as co-researchers promoted research with, rather than about students, centring the student voice. For people who may feel marginalised or silenced by traditional approaches to research, this is a valuable process. Second, participants may have felt more able to talk openly about their experiences of engaging (or not engaging) in leadership and volunteering with student peers. This avoided some of the inherent power imbalances we could have encountered if sensitive discussions about race, ethnicity, and religion, and the linked issues with university services, had been facilitated by white staff members. Finally, student co-researchers were able to offer context-sensitive insight into the perspectives and experiences of participants that generated alternative analyses and findings.

2.2.2.2 Student co-researcher role and contribution.

Once recruited to the project team, student co-researchers were provided with further background to the research and informal training about how to facilitate focus groups effectively, with a member of the research team experienced in this method. Our initial intention was to fully co-create the interview questions, however co-researchers expressed that they would appreciate a structure for the focus group. Therefore, it was emphasised that interview questions were suggestions and that co-researchers should feel free to support the discussions in directions relevant to the group.

The role of co-researchers was to recruit students from diverse ethnicities to take part in the project, lead a focus group interview about motivations, barriers, and aspirations in relation to university football volunteering, and to share insights from the interviews through a debrief with a member of the project team. Co-researchers also provided feedback on the representativeness of the findings produced from the analysis of the interviews. Importantly, co-researchers were remunerated for their time and contribution.

2.2.2.3 Focus group interview participants and analysis.

Across the three focus groups, 12 students took part in a peer-led interview: seven women and five men, from different ethnic backgrounds (see Table 1 on the following page). Students varied in terms of their volunteering status (some actively volunteered in university football, some volunteered in community football settings, some neither), and thus were able to discuss a range of motivations and barriers. We recognise that our sample predominantly included students whose description of their ethnicity falls within the broader category of Asian / Asian British, and therefore future research should aim to include representatives from a wider range of ethnicities. However, we contend that this is a limitation to co-produced research, one that is offset by the benefits that empowering co-researchers to lead this phase of the research afforded.

Focus group interviews took place either in person or via Microsoft Teams, and lasted an average of 47 minutes. Audio recordings were shared, transcribed, and analysed thematically by the research team. Debrief interviews were held following the analysis to discuss co-researchers' initial impressions of the nature of the discussions, highlight what was perceived to be most meaningful to participants, and to clarify interpretations offered by the research team.

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Table 1: Focus Group Interview Participants.

Participant Code (A, B, C = focus group)	Ethnicity	Gender	Football Volunteer Experience
A1	British Pakistani	Male	Volunteers as a coach within schools and plays casual football outside of university.
A2	British Pakistani	Male	Volunteers as a coach at a local club and plays for a local league team outside of university.
A3	British Pakistani	Male	Volunteers as a coach for a local league team and plays casual football outside of university.
A4	British Pakistani	Male	Volunteers as a coach at a local club occasionally and plays five-a-side football outside of university.
B1	British Indian	Female	Plays university football and has previously volunteered for the club committee (social secretary).
B2	British Sri Lankan	Female	Volunteers as team captain and plays university football.
B3	British Asian Other	Female	Volunteers as club social media secretary and plays university football.
B4	Vietnamese	Female	Volunteers as club treasurer and plays university football.
C1	Pakistani Asian British	Female	Volunteers with the county and national Football Association.
C2	British Asian Bangladeshi	Female	Plays football socially at university.
C3	Italian Asian Pakistani	Female	Does not play or volunteer in football.
C4	Arab Iraqi	Male	Volunteers as a youth football coach outside of university.

2.2.3 University stakeholder interviews.

The final phase of data collection involved interviews with HE employees with responsibility for volunteering and leadership in university football. Recognising that the university and club context affects the opportunities, motivations, and barriers for students from diverse ethnicities to engage in volunteering, this phase of the research sought to understand how universities and athletic departments approach volunteering within their football programmes. Five universities were purposively sampled, which varied in the following contextual characteristics:

- Football offer and infrastructure (emerging and established programmes).
- Student population and demographic.
- Geographic location.
- Degree course profile (number of sport related degree programmes offered).

Initial contact was made with a gatekeeper from each of the selected universities. This person then disseminated information about the research to relevant people within the institution, who gave informed consent to participate in the study. In total, 13 stakeholders were interviewed from across the five institutions – exact job roles varied, but all had responsibility for football leadership and volunteering. Some were involved from a strategy perspective (e.g., head of sport, head of football, athletic union director) while others had more influence and oversight of practice on-the-ground (e.g., football co-ordinators, programme managers, head of coaching). Table 2 provides an overview of the interview participants.

In order to maintain anonymity we have limited detail about the university itself, but have categorised institutions as either having an *established* football offer (e.g. competing at a high level in BUCS, a significant number of competitive teams with matched resources, a large recreational programme and an established volunteering process) or an *emerging* offer (e.g. a smaller number of competitive BUCS teams with less resources, limited numbers of volunteers, and newly established volunteering processes).

Interviews were held either face-to-face or via Microsoft Teams, for an average of 43 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded and thematically analysed by the research team. Interview questions were designed to prompt discussion around good practice and challenges in relation to:

- Policies / strategies for diversity and inclusion in leadership and volunteering.
- Resources for leadership and volunteering (e.g., people, infrastructure, finance).
- Leadership and volunteering recruitment practices.
- Leadership and volunteering training practices.
- Deployment / management of leadership and volunteering positions.

Table 2: Stakeholder Interview Participants.

Participant Code (S = staff)	Job Title	Responsibility for football volunteering and leadership	Football Offer
S1	Deputy Head of Sport	Strategic oversight	Emerging
S2	Sport Participation Officer	Recruitment, support, and retention	Emerging
S3	Sport and Wellbeing Co-ordinator	Recruitment, support, and retention	Established
S4	Deputy Head of Sport	Strategic oversight	Established
S5	Head of Football	Strategic oversight, recruitment, support, and retention	Established
S6	Football Programme Manager	Strategic oversight, recruitment, support, and retention	Established
S7	Head Coach	Recruitment, support, and retention	Established
S8	Head Coach	Recruitment, support, and retention	Established
S9	Football Co-ordinator and Coach	Recruitment, support, and retention	Emerging
S10	Head of Sport	Strategic oversight	Emerging
S11	Sport Co-ordinator	Recruitment, support, and retention	Emerging
S12	Head of Sport	Strategic oversight	Emerging
S13	Social Sport Co-ordinator	Recruitment, support, and retention	Emerging

3. QUANTITATIVE INSIGHTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL VOLUNTEER WORKFORCE

3.1. What do we know about students who engage in leadership and volunteering in university football?

Survey participants were asked to indicate whether they currently volunteer (or have previously volunteered) in any capacity within organised football, both within and outside of university. Table 3 highlights that a greater number of students who either do not volunteer, or volunteer in organised football *outside* of university, responded to the survey (50.5%), compared to students who volunteer *inside* of university, or who volunteer in both contexts (33.7%). Therefore, the analysis will present an overview of the characteristics of students with experience of volunteering within university football programmes, followed by an examination of how barriers to volunteering are experienced by students from different ethnicities.

Table 3: University Students' Football Volunteering Experience

Football Volunteer Experience	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Volunteers outside of university only	18	17.82%
Volunteers inside of university only	13	12.87%
Volunteers both inside and outside of university	21	20.79%
Does not volunteer in organised football	33	32.67%
Non-respondents	16	15.84%
Total	**101**	**100%**

3.2 Characteristics of students with experience of volunteering within university football programmes

This section provides details of the demographic characteristics of students who reported that they have experience of volunteering within university football programmes, to explore the diversity of current volunteers, and to examine any patterns among those students who engage in volunteering.

3.2.1 Ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Figure 1 presents the ethnicity and gender of students with experience of university football volunteering. Although the sample size means we cannot claim that this data is statistically representative of the wider university football volunteer population, it does indicate that the survey was successful in reaching students from diverse ethnicities (36% of survey participants).

Figure 1: University Football Volunteers' Ethnicity and Gender
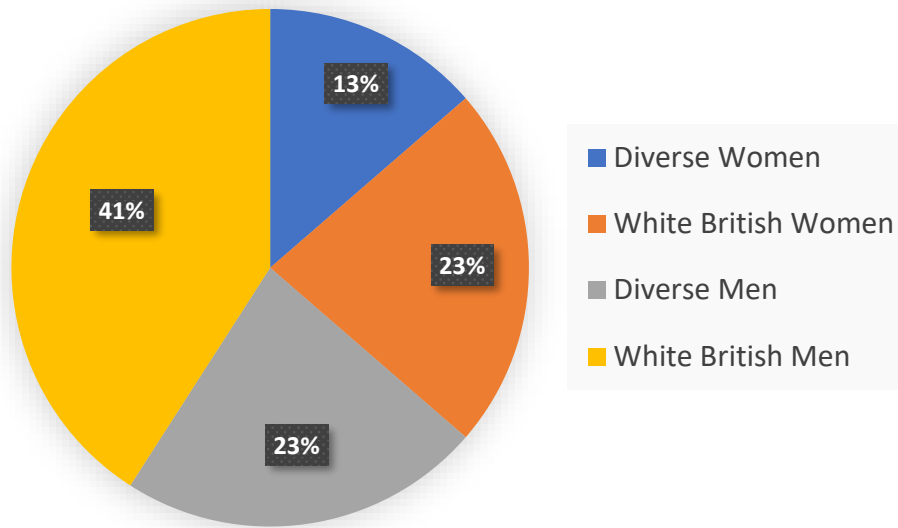
Furthermore, 87.5% of women with experience of university football volunteering identified as bisexual or homosexual, while 100% of men identified as heterosexual, highlighting the importance of recognising that students from diverse ethnicities may experience multiple marginalised identities.

3.2.2 Football volunteering and playing status.
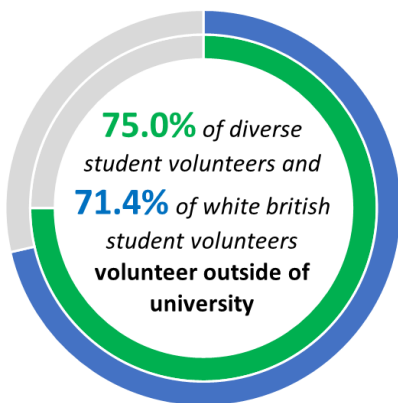
75.0% of student volunteers from diverse ethnicities, and 71.4% of White British students, also volunteered in organised football outside of university. This suggests that regardless of ethnicity, when students engage in leadership and volunteering for a university football programme, they are also highly likely to volunteer in football within their community too.

100% of student volunteers from diverse ethnicities, and 92.8% of White British students, indicated that they play football within or outside of university. A small group volunteered within university football but played for clubs in their communities (25.0% diverse students, 21.4% White British students). For students who volunteered and played within university, 94% took part in BUCS competitions (BUCS football or BUCS futsal), with 6% also playing in intramural competitions.
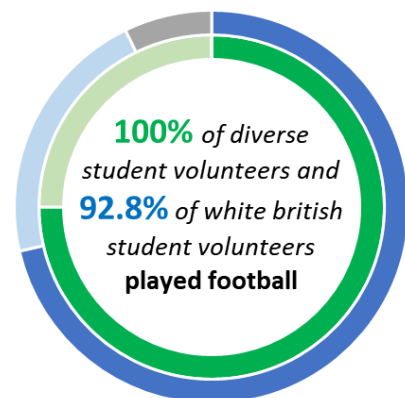
These results reinforce the link between a positive, welcoming participation and competition football offer with engagement in volunteering opportunities[15], for students from both diverse and non-diverse ethnicities.

3.2.3 University studies

Student football volunteers from diverse ethnicities were mostly enrolled in Sport degree courses (50.0%), as were White British students (69.2%). Volunteers also studied Social Studies, Maths, Engineering and Business degree programmes, and were most likely to be in their second (36.8%) or third (31.6%) year of undergraduate study, with no observable difference by ethnicity. This finding provides evidence for universities that there is value in adopting an approach that includes actively recruiting student volunteers from beyond the traditional route of sport related courses.

3.3 What do we know about students who are not currently engaged in leadership and volunteering in university football?

Non-volunteering students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements pertaining to why they do not volunteer in university football. Statements were rated from 0 = strongly disagree, to 10 = strongly agree. Analysis of responses to the survey questions revealed some differences between students from diverse ethnicities and White British students, in their rating of the contributing factors to why they were not currently engaged in university football volunteering (See Figure 2). No significant differences were observed by gender.

Figure 2: Non-Volunteering Students' Perceived Barriers to Engagement in University Football Volunteering Compared by Ethnicity

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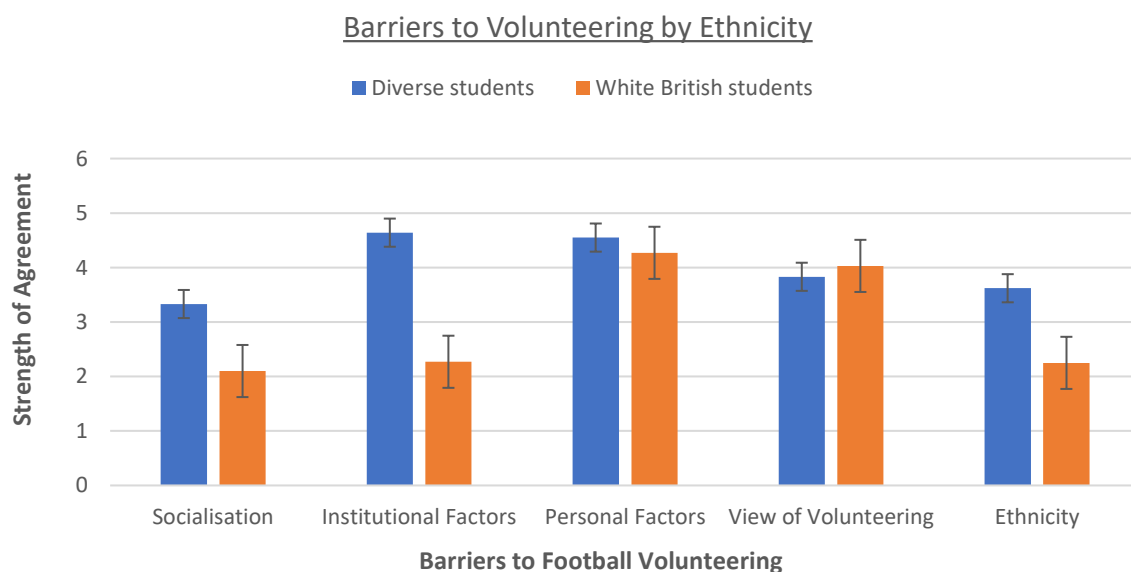
3.3.1 Socialisation Barriers.

This section of the survey asked students to rate the extent to which the volunteering behaviours and beliefs of friends and family impacted on their own engagement in football volunteering. Overall, neither group rated these statements highly, although there was a difference by ethnicity (diverse students *M* = 3.33, compared to White British students *M* = 2.10). This suggests that some students from diverse ethnicities may be less likely to volunteer if their friends and/or family do not volunteer, or because significant others do not perceive volunteering to be a valuable use of time.

3.3.2 Institutional Barriers.

The group of statements related to institutional barriers were rated the highest overall by students from diverse ethnicities and had the greatest difference by ethnicity (diverse students *M* = 4.64, compared to White British students *M* = 2.27). The statements diverse students agreed with most strongly were *'access to volunteering opportunities is poor within my university sport'* (*M* = 7.70), followed by *'the university doesn't provide support for volunteering'* (*M* = 7.05) This indicates that students from diverse backgrounds are more likely than White British students to perceive there is a lack of opportunity and support to engage in volunteering at university.

3.3.3 Personal Barriers.

Personal factors that respondents were asked to rate as barriers to their engagement in volunteering included skills and qualifications, time, finance, and transport. Both groups rated these statements highly (diverse students *M* = 4.55, White British students *M* = 4.27), reflecting previous research that has identified common barriers to volunteering in sport[1]. However, the similarity of the ratings implies that diverse students did not perceive personal factors to be any more of a barrier to volunteering than White British students.

3.3.4 View of Volunteering Barriers.

These survey statements asked students to rate the extent to which they understood the term volunteering, agreed that volunteering is useful, and knew where to access opportunities (higher responses indicating a lack of knowledge or value placed on volunteering). Both groups responded to these questions similarly (diverse students *M* = 3.83, White British students *M* = 4.03), meaning there were no discernible differences by ethnicity among students' personal views towards volunteering.

3.3.5 Ethnicity Barriers.

The survey questions related to how ethnicity is perceived to impact volunteering engagement were rated most strongly for students from diverse ethnicities (*M* = 3.62),

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compared to White British students (*M* = 2.25). Specifically, diverse students identified *'I am treated differently because of my ethnicity'* (*M* = 5.45), and *'I don't see people who look like me volunteering'* (*M* = 5.43) as barriers to their engagement in football volunteering. This indicates that diverse students are experiencing prejudice and discrimination within university spaces – something we explore further in Section 4.4.1 of this report – and highlights the importance of ensuring football clubs have diverse representation within their volunteer workforce.

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4. QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS FROM STUDENT-LED FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

4.1 Inspiring Volunteers

The extent to which new players feel welcome at a club can impact future intentions to both participate and volunteer[15]. Across the focus groups, students described different aspects of football club culture that affected how included they felt upon first attending a training session.

> **Reflective Questions for Clubs**
>
> **How welcoming is your club to new players from different backgrounds?**
>
> **Are all your players' needs and interests considered when planning social events?**

4.1.1 University football club culture is not experienced as welcoming to all students.

Notably, a lack of diversity within the current club membership meant that potential volunteers could feel it was difficult to fit in, or that university football was not a space for them.

> I remember coming in (to the club) and being like whoa ok, like everyone's white. (B2)

> When you come to university and it's obviously like, a lot of white lads (within the football club), it's almost like, 'oh I'm not probably going to be welcome there'. (A2)

> I remember in my first year, I was really nervous. I remember seeing one girl who is also from an Indian heritage, I remember being like, 'oh, that's nice', but it was only one person. (B1)

> The coach was white, and most people on the team were white, and white British, and me and one friend were the only brown people, Pakistani girls there. And she wasn't a Hijab, so I feel as if it was quite easy for her to kind of fit in. But with me, it was like what (C2) said about, it's mainly white people in the football sector at the moment. (C3)

Here, C3 highlights how her intersecting identities as a woman, Pakistani, and Hijab wearer meant that football and university sport did not offer a space where it was easy to feel included. Later in the interview, she elaborated:

> I know now, there's more people going into sports that are Hijabs but as a Muslim Pakistani though, and a Hijab, it is very hard to play sports. … For me personally my Hijab is a part of me and I feel uncomfortable if I don't have it on, like in your house it's OK, but when you're playing sports as well I feel more comfortable having it on. (C3)

Similarly, C2 spoke about her experience of team kit being exclusionary from her experience of university hockey.

> They (other players) were all Caucasian, they all had long hair, they all wore skorts, I didn't wear a skort because that obviously made me feel a bit uncomfortable, so I wore shorts instead. (C2)

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Choosing not to conform to club dress codes was one example students shared of ways they had learnt to effectively navigate and resist the dominant White norms and values within universities. Others included: adapting behaviours or ways of speaking to align with White British peers; proving themselves on the pitch to be accepted; and actively electing not to engage with university football – preferring instead to continue to volunteer within their local community clubs.

> I need to change certain parts of who I am (at university), I need to start to understand and learn, and adapt to the white students, because they are the outrageous majority. (C4)

> I personally have found myself code switching, and I kick myself for it because it is literally not me. (C1)

> I did feel included, but not the way I probably should have. I think they underestimated my skills, but when I scored then they were like, 'oh wow, OK'. (C2)

> I haven't left my comfort zone where I'm at my local football club, I know the people around there. … They understand, and they respect my culture, religion, and all that. (A4)

4.1.2 Football club social programmes can exclude potential volunteers.

For students who favoured volunteering outside of university in community clubs or schools, a club's social culture meant that university football was not experienced as a space where they would feel valued and included. This, combined with typical personal barriers to volunteering (time, finance, transport, work and/or study commitments)[1], meant that these students made an active choice not to engage with football volunteering at university. Students from Pakistani backgrounds raised how the social programmes offered by clubs reflected a drinking culture that acted as a barrier to their involvement:

> A2:   I follow them on Instagram, I see that them lads are always going out together, drinking and stuff, but obviously I wouldn't be able to do that with them.

> A1:   I think it's that drinking culture.

> A3:   Yeah, I agree with that.

> A2:   It's a different culture.

> A3:   It's a culture clash isn't it. You can't force something – like you trying to fit in with them, let's say you need to make that step –

> A2:   I'd rather be myself outside Uni.

> A3:   Are you going to literally go against your culture to go drinking to make sure you feel like you fit in, or would you rather just not go.

> A2:   I would never do that.

This exchange emphasises how university football social culture can create conditions where students from diverse ethnicities are expected to comply with social behaviours antagonist to their own beliefs and values, in order to feel part of the team. Students committed to their religious practice therefore faced a dilemma – conform and risk acting inauthentically (and risk impaired wellbeing resulting from a loss of integrity[16]) or elect not to participate in social activities involving alcohol, and risk exclusion from the group. The students in our research chose the latter.

Another student explained how other club members may lack understanding about religious beliefs and awareness of the reasons why some students may choose not to participate in social events:

> For them, it's more of an everyday activity (social drinking), but for us it's quite different. I feel like that is a barrier because a lot of the sports, I know that they go out literally every other day of the week, so it would be difficult for you to join a team. … Also they may not necessarily understand that it's a religious thing, or an individual thing, and they might just be like 'oh come on why not?' if that makes sense. (C2)

The concern that the social culture of a football club deterred some students from becoming more involved was, however, recognised by students who were active volunteers in university football:

> When I first went to circle (a weekly social consisting of structured drinking games) it was scary, I was like, I don't know any of these people, they're all probably so much different than me. I think if you have similar people, similar backgrounds, it makes it easier to settle in, and you're more likely to come back because you enjoy it, instead of feeling left out. (B4)

> When you're at socials, or looking at photos, sometimes like circle photos, you're the only brown person there. (B2)

> The fact that it's (social culture) not very diverse is an issue. It stands out more because you're socialising with a group of people that don't really look like you or haven't had similar experiences to you. (B1)

This illustrates one of the possible benefits of having a more diverse football workforce. Students from diverse ethnicities may be attuned to recognising how members with different beliefs, perspectives, skills, and experiences may be best supported to participate and feel included in football, and potentially engage in future volunteering. Concurrently, this points to a need for existing football volunteers in decision-making roles to consider all players' and volunteers' personal and cultural backgrounds when planning social events.

4.1.3 Students from diverse ethnicities adopt strategies to navigate football club culture.

Students changing parts of their identity to 'fit in', proving skills on the pitch for their ability as a player to be recognised, opting out of social practices that oppose religious beliefs, and

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actively choosing to disengage in university football volunteering, are strategies that reflect the additional emotional labour[17] and inequal access to opportunities that students from diverse ethnicities can experience within university football. This brings attention to the hidden consequences for students who fail to see anyone who looks like them when they first engage with a university football club.

Furthermore, these findings suggest that a lack of diversity within a club's current membership and workforce, alongside social programmes that fail to reflect the needs and interests of existing and future players, can create additional emotional work for potential volunteers, and act as a barrier to students from diverse ethnicities becoming involved with the club in the first place.

> If the pool of potential applicants, aka the football club is very white, then obviously the workforce is going to be really white. (B1)

The strategies outlined above enabled some students to operate in predominantly White British football spaces. However, an inclusive participation offer that welcomes and supports everyone who wants to be part of the club – by understanding and meaningfully addressing the barriers to participation and volunteering that students from different backgrounds encounter – is integral to improving diversity and inclusion in the football volunteer workforce.

> I think when we're in a place where we can be comfortably play sports as who we are, I think that's when success will happen. (C1)

4.1.4 Inspiring volunteers summary.

Our research presents implications for stakeholders with responsibility for volunteer recruitment and development. Firstly, it is important to know more about students who participate in university football programmes – insight that universities appear to lack (see section 5.1.1). Mapping the demographics of volunteers and players can be useful to understanding how representative a club's membership and workforce are of the university student population.

Secondly, to support institutions' strategic commitments to inclusive workforce development (see section 5.1.1), we suggest it is crucial for policy makers to understand how university football is experienced by students from diverse backgrounds, students representing different identities, and students who are both engaged and non-engaged in volunteering. This step is key to raising critical awareness of aspects of football club culture that contribute to additional emotional work and barriers to engagement for potential volunteers from diverse ethnicities.

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4.2   Recruiting Volunteers

For students from diverse ethnicities to feel encouraged to volunteer, club information about volunteering opportunities (and in the first instance, playing opportunities) need to be accessible and relatable; marketing images should signify that opportunities are open to all; and the role of social networks in supporting students to become volunteers should be critically reflected upon.

4.2.1 Students are motivated to volunteer in university football, but not all students feel that volunteering opportunities apply to them.

Students across the focus groups described a range of motivations to volunteer in university football, including wanting to coach to help players develop, taking on a role to apply skills learnt through their university course (such as media or finance), and being committed to increasing the inclusivity of a club:

> I guess I wanted to be team captain just to try and increase the number of people who joined football, who have never played before, like me. … So making football like a more welcoming place and one that's accessible to everyone. (B2)

> I haven't left my comfort zone where I'm at my local club, I know the people around there, they're all mostly South Asians, so I feel like I haven't really overcome any hard barriers. But I feel like in future I want to be able coach in other areas where we're not that much involved. And I feel like that's where the barriers are going to kick in for me. (A4)

This suggests that contrary to the attribution made by some stakeholders that underrepresentation may be due to a lack of interest in volunteering from some groups (see section 5.3.3), students from diverse ethnicities were motivated to contribute to their university clubs, and furthermore could bring an understanding of potential barriers to participation and a commitment to addressing these. Yet not all students felt that football volunteering opportunities within university were relevant to them.

4.2.2 Information about where to access volunteering opportunities is a barrier.

Reflecting the survey results that indicated that students from diverse ethnicities were more likely to report that they did not know where to access volunteering opportunities, or that access to volunteering opportunities was poor within their university sport (see section 3.3.2), non-volunteering students discussed a lack information about football club volunteering during the interviews.

A3:   I don't know the football coach, I'm not familiar with them, I'm not even familiar with how you'd get onto the team, if there's a sign-up process or whatever.

A1:   There's a lot of lack of communication.

A4:   What day is training on, what day are matches on, if there are matches when they will be – I feel like they just crop up and you're like, oh there's a game.

A3:   Yeah but you never know about it.

A2:   We never got notified sort of thing.

When asked to consider how communication could be improved, non-volunteering students emphasised the value of personal approaches, as opposed to generic email invitations.

A1:   Is there anything else that the Uni could do?

A3:   I just feel like they can approach us in person. Doing something in person is better than just reading some text in your email, you're just going to swipe it and go away. Even though you have the same interest, it's just the approach.

A2:   It might not seem as direct as well, because it's been sent out to everyone.

A3:   Exactly, then you don't feel like it applies to you. But another thing they could do I think, is ask students, just give them the option – do you want to play for the team, do you want to come to a trial, do you want to do some coaching? So if you're comfortable with doing a bit of coaching, then at least before you even start you don't feel like you have to settle in.

These quotes suggest that students from diverse ethnicities who may be motivated and experienced volunteers outside of university, may not see university football volunteering advertisements sent as emails as relevant to them. In contrast, face-to-face approaches encouraging volunteering (by university staff or student club representatives) were perceived to offer reassurance that a club would welcome them and value their experience.

4.2.3 Students became active volunteers following encouragement from peers.

As an example of how personal recruitment approaches are important to recruiting a more diverse volunteer workforce, students currently engaged in football leadership roles described how being invited to apply for a committee position by peers had given them the confidence to put themselves forward, despite their initial reservations.

I was interested in being part of the exec (executive club committee), but I didn't really consider it because I'm a fresher, I'm on the 4th (team) and I didn't know a lot of people in football. So, I was a bit intimidated, but then Ellie texted me, and was like 'oh are you interested in being treasurer?' And then that's when the idea came into my mind that I could actually go for it. (B4)

> I think most of the first friends I made at football were all on the exec, and I realised how close they all were, and how they were all the exec but had their own role. … I wasn't going to run for any exec role, but I feel like I kind of got pushed into it – not pushed, but encouraged into by everyone. (B3)

Both these accounts emphasise the importance of peer support to students becoming volunteers. However, as outlined in sections 4.1.2 and 4.3.2, building social networks within football may be more effortful for students from diverse ethnicities, due to cultural norms and practices that marginalise students who may arrive at university with different physical, social, and economic capital (resources that enable individuals to pursue their interests and operate effectively in a context)[18].

Moreover, non-volunteering students described how the absence of peer social networks meant it was less likely that they would consider applying for roles: "you get tapped because you've made those friendships. It's more like an inside thing, to be fair." (C1). Elections for student club committee positions were also seen as a popularity contest, as opposed to a meritocratic process of choosing who is more suited to a role based on individual skills or experience. Those students who actively participated in the social culture of a club were perceived more likely to be selected for volunteering roles:

> If you are part of that free drinks and all of that culture, you're more likely to become the president of that team. In comparison to someone that doesn't get involved in that sort of stuff, but is amazing or has the same skillset to be that captain or president of that society. (C1)

This contrasts with accounts from stakeholders with responsibility for volunteer recruitment, that systems for selecting students to fill volunteer positions are perceived as meritocratic, inclusive, and open to all (see sections 5.1.3 and 5.3.3).

4.2.4 Images that support volunteer recruitment campaigns matter.

When considering the inclusivity of volunteer recruitment processes within university football clubs, it is important to reflect on not only where opportunities are promoted and to whom, but how they are advertised. Students identified the problematic nature of images that sometimes appear in club marketing materials and social media accounts.

> A3:   When you said you follow the team, have you seen anyone else from like, ethnic minority there?

> A2:   I've seen on the stories on the Instagram, I've only seen white.

> You know those pictures around campus? Our one is literally a stereotypical white, blond, blue, green eyes person playing football. Does that not give the wrong impression to people – not the wrong impression, but surely if you want to attract other people, would you not change that? (B3)

The lack of diverse images of players on a club's social media account, combined with posts that publicise social events involving drinking alcohol (see section 4.1.2), signify that university football is a welcoming space for some students, but not others. In particular, social media posts that profile existing club committee volunteers through images that show social drinking (we have seen anecdotal evidence of this), may discourage students from different backgrounds to apply to volunteer roles.

While we caution against tokenistic actions to include more diverse images within marketing materials – without other measures in place to address diversity and inclusion more widely[19] – profiling positive images and stories of students from diverse ethnicities engaged in football volunteering can demonstrate that roles are open to students from different backgrounds. Equally, an audit of the unintended messages that social media posts convey is something clubs may benefit from exploring, especially as these channels may be the first way that future student volunteers interact with a club.

4.2.5 Recruiting volunteers summary.

Inclusive club processes for selecting students to fill volunteer roles should aim to promote access to social networks for students from all backgrounds that can lead to peer recruitment, alongside targeted, personalised recruitment strategies that do not rely solely on peer encouragement and informal word-of-mouth networks (see also section 5.1.3). This approach would go some way to facilitating social capital for all volunteers, not just those from one group[5]. This may counteract the tendency for student committee elected positions to be appointed based primarily on social connections, rather than relevant skills and experience. Finally, exploring the intended and unintended messages conveyed through images accompanying marketing materials, may highlight areas of recruitment practices for improvement.

4.3   Supporting Volunteers

An important part of supporting underrepresented groups to develop and progress as volunteers, is to find ways to enhance individuals' networks, and the social and cultural capital that can be derived from connections with others inside and outside of football. Our research highlights the role of peers, family, and mentors in facilitating volunteer engagement.

> **Reflective Questions for Clubs**
>
> **How can you support existing volunteer role models to develop relevant skills, experience, and networks? Is mentoring actively provided for diverse volunteers, or do individuals have to seek opportunities out?**

4.3.1 Students experienced support from peers for volunteering, but not always family.

Students involved in football leadership positions described receiving information and support about how to undertake their roles from peers who were current or past volunteers, emphasising the importance of social networks to volunteer development.

> I had to learn quite quickly what I was supposed to do, and how I was supposed to do it. I had other people I knew on the exec last year who knew what they were doing, so they kind of helped me and guided me through it. (B3)

> I wanted to take a bigger role and have the responsibility in what happens, so yeah, I went for it and then I'm really glad I did. There are a lot of challenges with the technicalities of it, because I'm treasurer, with financial stuff, and I'm constantly texting Jen and Alex for help. (B4)

Other students discussed variations in the support received from families to engage in football volunteering alongside their university studies, revealing gendered barriers to encouragement for volunteering.

> My dad actually doesn't know I do football because he's very against it, like he's quite traditional, so yeah he doesn't know about any of this. And my mum, well she knows that I play football, but she would also be very against me taking a bigger role that distracts me from my studies as well. … My family is really traditional, football is seen as a man's sport, like very aggressive. And I mean people in my family discourage the girls playing it in general, so yeah, it's quite sad because I can't really talk to them about my experiences. (B4)

> B3:   When I said to my mum, yeah I'm going to run for it (social media secretary), she was like 'you need to keep into account your studies, it's going to be a big role'.

> B2:   Yeah, my mum said the exact same thing, and she still does to be honest. … I do both football and cricket and it does take up a lot of time, so I think my mum was just worried that adding something else on top of that would make me lose focus of my studies and to have any exec role, there's an added responsibility that you have to fulfil, especially in my final year.

> I was social sec and my parents were quite wary. They were like, 'oh, football is taking up a lot of time. Are you sure you can balance it?' And my rationale is I'm already doing all this football, I might as well get some credit for it. (B1)

> I'm definitely doing coaching. And when you want to pose that to Arab parents, initially the reaction is 'what are you talking about, you're doing engineering, why are you doing coaching, is there even such a thing?' (C4)

There was agreement among the focus group participants that while parents of most students may caution against taking on significant volunteering responsibilities alongside

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studying, that this was perhaps a common barrier for students from families of diverse ethnicities, as this co-researcher summarised:

> So, we are at university to study, but that it feels like for us it's been reinforced maybe a bit more than other people in the club who we're not from similar ethnic backgrounds potentially. And so that's more of a barrier that we're encountering. (B1)

Students spoke of the various ways that they negotiated concerns from families and continued volunteering: providing rationales for taking on roles that they knew would be accepted; empathising with their parents' own views and experiences of university; and choosing not to share their experiences as a volunteer with family members. This finding suggests that students from diverse ethnicities can sometimes lack the social support that families can provide when there is a shared understanding of wider university culture and the potential benefits of participating and volunteering in clubs and societies, such as football[20].

This further highlights the problematic notions underpinning university football volunteer recruitment and development programmes that implicitly assume students arrive at university having had the same access to experiences, opportunities, and support (see section 5.1.3).

4.3.2 Access to mentors may help to redress imbalances in access to football opportunities.

Students from diverse ethnicities who were active volunteers and interested in following a career in football, as a coach or through activism, described the importance of mentors and role models in the sport, but recognised that access to developing these relationships was not equitable.

> I had no mentor, no mentor for the first five years, right now I still don't. But I've met a lot of good people actually and they've helped me out a lot, but I've had no mentors from when I was 16 to probably a whole year into Uni, and then I met someone who I can actually relate to, and that can help me out in more ways than just coaching practice and stuff like that. (C4)

> When you're brown, it's a bit hard, I'm not going to lie to you. How many coaches do you actually see of our minority? (A3)

> The communications, like we all miss stuff. We don't know where the opportunities are. And if we have a mentor that's actually within the (football) system, helping us to get into the system, it would just make things so much easier. Because we'll have that information that we lack, or we'll be able to make those connections with other people in the industry that will make it a bit easier for us to show them what we have. (C1)

Effective mentoring initiatives – where mentees and mentors have choice in who they are matched with; relationships are characterised by mutual trust; and mentees and mentors receive appropriately tailored support to meet their needs – can enhance volunteers'

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experience of inclusion and development[5]. The mechanisms for how mentoring can contribute to redressing imbalances in access to university football volunteering are unclear. However, carefully selected mentors, who engage in critical reflection upon the structures and practices that create inequalities, are potentially well placed to support volunteers from diverse ethnicities to access the football knowledge, opportunities, and networks that students in our research identified as barriers to their development:

> Being of an ethnic minority, I feel like we have to work twice as hard to get where we want to get, if that makes sense. So, in a way I feel like the people who are white and stuff, I feel like – I don't know if I'm overthinking it, but I feel like they get a lot more support, or they have a lot more knowledge. (C2)

> I feel as if I'm competing against everyone else because I'm like 10 years behind an individual that has that accessibility, has that access that I didn't have when I was younger. (C1)

> Going into football completely new to the sport, completely fresh, you know no one, you know nothing of FAs, County FAs, you don't know how the leagues work, you don't know how promotions work, you don't know how the registration part of it works. You have to learn this all on the go, you just don't know anything about grass roots because you don't spend time in it. (C4)

4.3.2 Supporting volunteers summary.

With few role models in the professional game, the importance of supporting existing volunteers from diverse backgrounds to become future role models is apparent[6]. Students engaged in university football volunteering are likely to actively volunteer within their communities too (see section 3.2.2). Therefore, investing in developing student volunteers to develop relevant skills, experience, and networks can make an important contribution to the football workforce. However, access to mentors was a barrier identified by the students in our research. Rather than systems that require individuals to seek out opportunities (see section 5.3.3), we propose that volunteer mentoring should be proactively offered to students from diverse ethnicities, to help redress imbalances in access to football knowledge, experiences, and networks.

4.4   Retaining Volunteers

To promote diversity and address the underrepresentation of marginalised students within football volunteering, clubs need to create the space and conditions for current and future volunteers to feel included and heard. Our research highlights the importance of understanding the

Reflective Questions for Clubs

How included do your current volunteers feel? Can volunteers raise any concerns they have? How often do you seek and respond to feedback from your volunteers?

local volunteer experience and the extent to which
it is welcoming, supportive, and inclusive.

4.4.1 Diversity in the volunteer workforce was accidental rather than by design.

At University B, where students from diverse ethnicities volunteered for their university club committee (in roles including treasurer, social secretary, social media office and team captain), students recognised that despite their involvement, they were not aware of any institutional actions designed to promote diversity within the club membership or elected volunteering positions. Students reflected that diversity in committee roles seemed to occur by accident, rather than design.

> B2: I agree with both of you and think the clubs not diverse enough, even like previous exec, I don't think they were diverse either.
>
> B1: I'd say when I was exec it was me, Farah, Naomi...
>
> B2: OK, last year I don't think it was –
>
> B1: I remember being like, oh it's an all-white exec, reversing it like that.
>
> B2: Yeah, and even the number of times I've been mistaken for Anisha is ridiculous, we don't look alike.
>
> B1: You look nothing alike.

In discussing the lack of students from diverse ethnicities within elected committee positions, one student described being frequently mistaken for another volunteer, despite as another student observes, looking nothing alike. This example of a microaggression – a subtle, everyday interaction which causes harm, whether intended or unintended[16]– suggests that students from diverse ethnicities can experience prejudice and discrimination as volunteers, which may impact upon future intentions to volunteer[5].

4.4.2 Spaces are needed where volunteers can share their experiences.

Later in the interview, students talked about using humour to highlight the lack of diversity within the club membership: "I think everybody knows from my jokes that the football club is not diverse at all." (B2); "Jokes are made because it's just a stark reality that there's not many of us." (B1). Humour has been identified as a strategy that can be used to deflect or resist racial discrimination[21]. Furthermore, as part of the debrief interview, B1 reflected that the focus group interview had provided an opportunity to discuss the lack of diversity within the club meaningfully.

> I think one of the questions I asked was 'what is your opinion on the diversity of the club?' and B3 kind of just laughed and was like, "Well, I always make jokes about it. It's not great." And

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> that kind of struck me, because I was like, "oh yeah, you do always make jokes about it, but it's never actually talked about properly." (B1)

This suggests that there is a role for universities in creating spaces where students from diverse ethnicities can feel comfortable to speak about their experiences in a safe and open environment. Understanding students' stories can help to address the concern that some White British stakeholders expressed that they lack an understanding of the experiences of diverse students (see section 5.1.2).

4.4.3 Retaining volunteers summary.

Our research suggests that students did not perceive that diversity in the football workforce was in direct response to an organisational university strategy, policy, or practice; more that it occurred randomly. Student volunteers valued an opportunity to meaningfully discuss the lack of diversity within their club, highlighting that more spaces for students from diverse ethnicities to share their experiences, views, and ideas are needed. Finally, there was evidence of students experiencing microaggressions in their volunteering role, indicating that football club members and representatives may benefit from understanding, addressing, and challenging implicit biases[16].

5. QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS FROM UNIVERSITY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The following section reflects the insight produced from the accounts of HE employees with responsibility for volunteering and leadership in their differing university contexts. The findings are summarised into three central themes (see Figure 3) and explained below.

Figure 3: Influence of Higher Education Culture and Context on Diversity and Inclusion in Football Volunteering

Institutional Approaches to Diversity and Inclusion in Volunteering	Contextual Barriers and Enablers to Diversity and Inclusion in Volunteering	Perception of Skills and Qualities Required of Volunteers

5.1 Institutional Approaches to Diversity and Inclusion in University Football Volunteering and Leadership

Our research suggests that, while diversity and inclusion is often discussed at a policy and strategic level, there is more work to be done in ensuring these debates translate into purposeful action on-the-ground. Ensuring staff members are well equipped to address the issues, and that top-down volunteer recruitment practices are inclusive and equitable, are two key areas for improvement.

5.1.1 Strategy mandate.

Promisingly, a recognition of diversity and inclusion in relation to volunteer workforce development was reported to be featured in all departmental-level policy documents. Stakeholders valued and recognised the importance of this type of work:

> We very much are wanting to ensure there's a diverse cohort of students engaged in the sport, and also students and staff being employed by us. (S4)

> We absolutely have a focus on being inclusive in all protected characteristics, yes, that's absolutely a focus. (S1)

However, when examining strategic priorities for diversity work in football, addressing gender imbalances in participation and the workforce appeared more prominent than tackling the underrepresentation of students from diverse ethnicities. This perhaps reflects the wider football landscape, where there has been a clear focus on gender equality and inclusion within the FA's strategic priorities[22].

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> I would love to get more female coaches involved in coaching in football at the university. There's like an initiative through the FA that we try and get involved with. (S6)

> The enjoyment for the girls is also a strategy of mine, personally. (S9)

> Women's football is one of our focal sports. (S10)

Although all stakeholders recognised the significance of diversity in relation to ethnicity, few were able to clearly outline the demographics of the students currently involved in football programmes, data which we suggest is crucial to understanding how representative a club's membership and workforce are of the university student population.

> INT*: How reflective are those demographics of the wider student population?
> S5: I don't know, but I would imagine not very. I'm not too sure about that one to be honest.

> INT: You might have these stats and this data somewhere, but is it relatively diverse in terms of say, ethnicity or cultural background? Does it mirror the wider university?
> S6: I wouldn't say I have that information. It's a really difficult question to answer because I don't think I know the answer. (S6)

> INT: Is the institution largely White British, or is there maybe a bit of a mix?
> S8: I don't think so, to be honest. Well, I think that is the majority, but I don't think it's significant. And I can tell you, for example, I collect a lot of data, that's the type of data I don't really care much because it is what it is. (S8)

> I would say probably 10% from BAME maybe? Mainly White … That's not data, just my impression … It would be interesting to find out a demographic in terms of our memberships within [university sport]. (S3)

In addition to some ambivalence regarding the role of demographic insight to inform diversity and inclusion policy, there appeared to be a lack of clarity among staff members as to what approaches to diversity and inclusion meant for on-the-ground practice.

> That's absolutely a focus (diversity). When you challenge me on what we do for that it might be a more difficult conversation, but yes, it is absolutely a key focus. (S1)

> I think my role going forward is to try and do some more targeted stuff with international students... I don't know why it's taken until now for me to realise that there's a problem there, but I think that's something I'm going to do going forward. (S3)

> I think the first piece for us would be recognition of what our current level is, what the problems are at the minute, and where we even are, essentially, benchmarking, exactly, before we can then try and put the stuff in place to try and improve, hopefully. (S13)

* = Interviewer

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At one institution, stakeholders outlined the challenge of engaging with students who play football but as part of graduate student sport programmes that run independently from the Athletic Union; highlighting how a university's sport infrastructure can reproduce segregated provision and undermine attempts to meaningfully include certain groups in opportunities to volunteer in football.

> Now, the argument, the discussion has been what makes them different to any other students? They're students like any other student. All of a sudden, they're divided out as a separate populous within the student market. Now, they do (free) five-a-side sessions, they do football sessions. A lot of Asian students … we know football is very popular, but that sits completely separate. (S12)

In summary, although there was commonly an institutional strategy mandate to address diversity and inclusion within university football, examples of positive action to enhance opportunities for students of diverse ethnicities to volunteer were scarce. Inadequate knowledge of how diverse and inclusive current programmes were, segregated sport provision, and a lack of shared understanding of how to address underrepresentation in practice were contributing factors.

5.1.2 Staff understanding of barriers and responsibility for diversity work.

Notably, the majority of the staff interviewed for this research identified as White British. Many participants acknowledged they had no lived experiences of the barriers experienced by students from diverse ethnicities in becoming and developing as a volunteer. When asked to reflect upon the challenges of addressing this, stakeholders described limited understanding of the issues that students may face; or identified generic barriers, or those that other marginalised groups may encounter.

> I'm a white person and I can't ever profess to understand, I can probably make some assumptions … what do I think the barriers are? … I think there are lots of barriers to students participating in our clubs because of perceptions around what it is and is it for them. So I imagine that probably does have the same effect for people, they might not think their race is represented and so they feel it's not for them. (S1)

> I don't know why not because again I could guess, but it would just be my completely unexpert opinion. (S5)

> I think part of the challenge is role models in relation to the fact that – it's a bit like the 'Can't See, Can't Be' campaign which is a gender-based one but it's exactly the same for other people of ability or disability or different ethnicities … But in terms of barriers, it's a tricky one, isn't it? (S10)

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Moreover, there was uncertainty as to who was explicitly responsible for diversity and inclusion within institutions. Although it was nominally part of everyone's job, there appeared to be no evidence of regular discussions around diversity of the workforce and in some cases no explicit Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training offered to staff.

> INT: Is there any training for you as a coach for example, and your workforce, around kind of unconscious bias and EDI training?
>
> S6:   No, nothing that we've been spoken to about or anything involved in the mandatory training that we have to do (S9).

> We listen a lot and there are CPDs and conversations sometimes, and people come to talk about diversity, equality and all of that. To be honest, and maybe it's me being very naïve but it's something we don't – I remember three years ago there was a picture of our team and we didn't have a black player in the team, and it was questioned, 'why don't you have a black player?' I don't know, I never thought about it. I don't select players based on their colours. ... Internally in the programme we don't talk about it because it never seemed to be a problem. (S8)

In institutions with emerging football programmes, staff capacity was cited as a barrier to focusing more on enhancing opportunities for marginalised groups:

> How do they then have the time to then look at underrepresented groups and have them in? Which is something that we'd definitely like to put our time into, but it's just a capacity thing. Once you've got all the leagues and the fixtures and everything up and running, it's having the time to then do the developmental pieces. (S13)

In the absence of critical knowledge of the lived experiences of students from diverse ethnicities both engaged and non-engaged in football as players and as volunteers; appropriate CPD opportunities; and roles that are properly resourced to support diversity work, it may be difficult for institutions to meaningfully meet their strategic priorities for addressing the underrepresentation of students from diverse ethnicities in volunteering. Improved role clarity for how staff in all positions can contribute to this agenda, alongside accountability for action, may help to create conditions where coaches, development officers, and managers alike think explicitly about ethnicity when considering their practice.

5.1.3 Recruitment practices.

The top-down practices involved in the recruitment, support, and retention of volunteers varied somewhat by institution. For example, some universities had well established, formal volunteering processes, in which students would apply for various roles through an online portal and receive formal mentoring. Other institutions used informal practices to recruit, such as through word-of-mouth, and offered ad hoc mentoring and development opportunities.

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> Yeah, an application. They often have to do an interview and a session before they're assigned to a team. (S7)

> They might have friends on their course or people that they can recommend, so they might say 'ah so and so has contacted me, like they would be really good for the programme. You should talk to them and see what they want to do next year'. And so a lot of it as well is through word-of-mouth. (S6)

> We'll provide subsidies for coaching and officiating qualifications in a variety of sports, if the students sign up for the volunteer programme. (S10)

Regardless of the practices used, there was general agreement that all practices were perceived to be meritocratic. That is, the practices used were non-discriminatory, inclusive, and open to any student who wanted to engage:

> We have a ranking system where we judge everybody based on their ability, which helps us then standardise our approach, and try and remove, you know, if there is any unconscious bias. I'm trying to think - it's the same with the coaches as well. I wouldn't say we're the most diverse football programme. But I also think that's probably reflective of the university, because I don't think we're really diverse here either. But I would like to say that we don't discriminate and that we try and welcome everybody and give everybody the equal opportunity to play. (S6)

> I think the way we look at it is that all our clubs are open and inclusive. All our sessions are open and inclusive. (S3)

While we welcome moves to eradicate unconscious bias from selection processes, recruitment opportunities positioned as 'open to all' can overlook the imbalances in access to football opportunities that marginalised students may have experienced prior to university (see sections 4.1 and 4.3). Furthermore, research suggests that non-discriminatory practices in HE does not necessarily mean that they are *anti-racist*[23]. We encourage institutions to make bolder commitments to transforming systems, structures, and practices to actively promote social justice and inclusion. For example, by finding ways to address how students' social capital is built through attending social events, despite a shift in the nature of the social activities:

> We do get the feedback that says, I want to play sport, I don't want to be part of that culture. I struggle with that because I think a lot of it is perception rather than actuality, and a lot of our clubs, don't get me wrong, yes, they absolutely like a drink. But I think the culture, the actual environment has improved tenfold in terms of they do try to be more inclusive around, you don't have to drink, you don't have to come on socials, but I think it can also contribute to students not feeling part of it. So that could absolutely be something why somebody might not be considered one of the popular kids and therefore might not feel like their voice would be heard in a committee election, for example. (S1)

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While the intentions around strategy mandates, staff responsibility for diversity, and recruitment of volunteers may not actively discriminate, it is apparent from our research that institutions can develop critical awareness of issues linked to race and ethnicity and be proactive in supporting a more diverse range of students to engage in volunteering. Some practical recommendations for how to approach this are suggested in section 6.0.

Reflective Questions for University Staff

How does your strategy mandate linked to diversity and inclusion translate to on-the-ground practice?

What do you currently know about levels of diversity in your football programmes? What demographic information do you collect, and how does this get used?

Who has explicit responsibility for EDI practice in your organisation? What understanding of the issues do they have?

What recruitment practices do you employ and how might they enable or constrain diverse students' access to volunteering?

5.2 Contextual Barriers and Enablers to Engaging Diverse Students

It is recognised that the profile of HE institutions vary greatly and thus impacts (both positively and negatively) the ways in which universities can promote opportunities and support diverse students in sport volunteering contexts. Understanding these contextual barriers and enablers should help institutions to assess what practices and interventions align with their context.

5.2.1 University profile.

The university staff that participated in our research represented institutions with different contextual characteristics that influenced their approach to diversity and inclusion in football volunteering programmes. For example, the demographics of the student population were often highlighted as important in engaging diverse students into volunteering roles. Moreover, the suite of degree programmes offered were also seen as important – it was perceived to be 'easier' to recruit students who may be studying sport related courses. Our research, however, indicates that student volunteers study a range of degree programmes (see section 3.2.3). Geographical factors were also crucial – where the sports facilities were

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located, how easy it was to travel to and from key locations, and whether the institution had multiple campuses, were all deemed to be either enablers or barriers.

> Yeah, anecdotally, I'd say, [university] is a very white university, and football is probably the same. (S13)

> We have multiple campuses so try to get as many people involved in sport and have sport as accessible to all as it can be… it's a little bit harder to get people to come over to [campus] to volunteer. (S2)

> Talking about workforce, it's predominantly going to be students who are looking to move into those sorts of positions when they leave university. (S4)

5.2.2 Internal partnerships.

The ability to work with internal partners was identified as being important in supporting the recruitment of volunteers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Some of this was linked to the university profile, for example having strong internal partnerships with sports-related courses (e.g., coaching, sports marketing, and sports science) were often used to target recruitment drives.

> I would say more sports students but not exclusively…I'd say 75% [of our volunteers] are on sport related courses. (S5)

> It could be linked to their course and they need to do volunteer hours or something and so they've got a definitive, I'm going to be a coach, I want more experience, and that's part of their pathway. (S1)

> Obviously like the sport scientists, for example, are currently on their course working in a sport programme. (S6)

However, wider partnerships with specific student groups – for example faith and cultural groups, or international societies – were not used as widely among these case study universities as places to recruit potential volunteers from. When considering the engagement of diverse volunteers, this becomes problematic as it was anecdotally recognised that most students on sport courses are themselves White British.

> Thinking about the coaching course, for example, they are again proportionally a White course. (S5)

> Our [campus name] based student groups are your very atypical 18- to 21-year-old, mostly British… They do lots of our coach education, teacher training courses, that's very much the types of students that are engaged in our sports programmes. (S1)

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> I think most of them are students trying to get that experience, so obviously anyone who's done video analysis for us, they would have been of a white background. (S9)

> If there is then a big drive for increasing participation, that's then probably going to come back to us to then look at how we can maybe work with these different networks. (S13)

5.2.3 Resource and infrastructure.

The resource allocated to volunteering and leadership programmes was also a significant factor in the perceived success at engaging students from diverse backgrounds. The identified resources which were of particular importance were human resources, financial resources, and facilities and physical infrastructure.

> You might have student coaches that will either run the teams lower down the order, or they may assist the coaches to do that. Some of those may get a student bursary. (S4)

> In terms of our pitches and what we have access to, yes, we're really lucky. We've got two or three artificial pitches. I think like seven grass pitches (S6).

> Everyone wants to train on the 3G pitch … there was just no space and no-one wanted to move off … If we had more pitch time we could do more. More sessions, more opportunities for players and volunteers alike. (S5)

The 'football offer' and resource to support delivery was also a significant factor. Universities with an established football offer (i.e., more BUCS teams and a larger intramural programme) tended to have more of these resources at their disposal.

> We had to cancel one of the teams just because of commitment, the studies. I feel that's a bit challenging until we become like [other universities] whereby sport is the main sort of focus. (S9)

> It's about access to opportunities and recreation, but also around sporting performance. I think traditionally that's always been a very big focus of the sports department, and really backed up with the funding, and scholarship, and support and everything else. (S5)

> I think from our point of view as well, a barrier for us would just be the capacity. (S13)

The context of the university and football programme must be accounted for when considering the type of work that should be undertaken in relation to diversity and inclusion in volunteering. While the profile of the university and its resources differ, it is important for individual institutions to assess what they can do in proportion to their means. Some smaller steps may require less resources, such as engaging with faith groups and cultural societies to diversify the player and volunteer base, but still be impactful.

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Reflective Questions for University Staff

Considering your context, what factors – e.g., demographics, courses offered, geography – may enable or constrain a diversity of volunteering in football?

What networks do you draw upon to engage with potential volunteers? What type of students are likely to find out about volunteering opportunities?

What information about your club is publicly available?

What resources (financial, human, physical) do you allocate to improving diversity in football and volunteering?

5.3 The Perception of the Skills and Qualities Needed to Volunteer

The final theme links to staff members' perceptions of what makes a 'good' volunteer. What staff purport to be looking for in volunteers is important to consider when exploring the underrepresentation of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. These perceptions will shape who is likely to be included or approached for voluntary opportunities, while also potentially excluding people who do not meet these expectations. Importantly, staff discussed a range of personal skills and qualifications that they would like their volunteers to have, including showing initiative to seek out volunteering opportunities.

5.3.1 Personal skills and characteristics.

Within the interviews, staff described different personal skills and qualities expected of potential volunteers. Frequently mentioned among these were communication skills, which was often explained as the ability to engage verbally with peers. Moreover, confidence was also commonly discussed as being an ideal quality for volunteers to have. This was often perceived as the ability to be self-assured, self-reliant, and have belief in oneself in their volunteering role.

If we're looking, we just want people that can engage and talk. (S1)

So, experience levels vary but there is a direct correlation between experience and confidence, which I guess makes sense. (S5)

I've got some good coaches now, if they recommend other people, I can trust that the people that they're going to recommend are going to be like up to what you would like (S6).

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Although not overtly discriminatory, these perceptions may subtly favour students from White British backgrounds. For example, when people refer to 'good communication skills' they may be unconsciously referring to people's accent and ability to speak English fluently. It is perhaps unsurprising that students from non-White backgrounds, who are underrepresented in these spaces, do not exude the same levels of 'confidence' in their abilities as their White British counterparts. This is especially true when existing volunteers are all White British. Some staff members recognised how existing values and ways of working may be off putting for prospective diverse volunteers:

> Whereas maybe for students from a different ethnic background they might – if they get rejected at trials they might be thinking, maybe I don't belong here. Maybe I wouldn't fit in here. I can see how the atmosphere and the environment would maybe put someone off. So, the people that come back from trials wanting to get involved as a coach are all White. (S5)

These personal qualities require certain forms of social, cultural, and physical capital. While previous literature points to the ways in which volunteering develops capital [5,24], it is also clear from this research that prospective volunteers need certain forms of capital to access these roles in the first place.

5.3.2 Qualifications.

For many roles, specific qualifications were not deemed to be a pre-requisite to volunteering. However, for some roles, namely coaching, qualifications were seen to be a marker of a good volunteer.

> I prefer it if you do [have qualifications], because then then it shows that you've taken the initiative to like actively go in and develop your coaching. (S6)

> I've gone to [coach educator] and said, do you know any qualified goalkeeper coaches that want to do like a placement or want to get experience so they can come and coach. (S9)

> I think the challenge for volunteers is they get caught up in … the professionalisation agenda which I understand … it's great that standards have been driven up for coaching generally, but I've always been quite vocal about the fact that we need to keep things proportionate. (S10)

The FA have identified that coaches who access football coaching courses in the England are largely White British, and that there is an underrepresentation of diverse ethnic backgrounds undertaking coaching qualifications[25]. In addition, we know that international students would not have the same access to FA courses as home-based students. Therefore, while well intentioned, the 'professionalisation agenda' can inadvertently exclude diverse students.

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5.3.3 Showing initiative.

One of the features that staff emphasised that they were looking for in volunteers was for students to take the initiative and seek out opportunities. Thus, a large proportion of the volunteer workforce was described as made up of students who were actively looking to volunteer and felt comfortable to ask about such opportunities.

> We do get the keen people that would walk through the door and say, I want to referee, or, I want to be part of something. (S1)

> I normally get an email from people who are interested. So it's more them coming to me than me going out to reach the students. (S2)

> The students actively sign up for the volunteer programme. (S10)

Moreover, it was recognised that many volunteers come from within football clubs as players step up to take on coaching or committee roles.

> They tend to come from the club, obviously, from the year before and then they're elected by their peers. (S1)

> We offer coaching badges to our players, Level 1 and 2. We allow them to be part of our technical teams and structures, when they are in the last year, they can be part of our technical structure. (S8)

> At the minute most of our – I'd say most of our coaches, referees, and definitely most of our volunteers, they all come from people who are already involved in the club. (S13)

This approach to volunteering is reflective of the meritocratic attitude towards volunteers – those who are good enough, will want to do it and will seek out the opportunities. As discussed in sections 4.4.1 and 5.1.1, there was little evidence of institutional actions designed to recruit diverse volunteers. Instead, recruitment practices rely predominantly on informal networks and word-of-mouth, or recruiting from within the club. Unfortunately, if a club's participation base is not diverse, these methods of recruitment will never be wholly equitable. In this way, staff may perpetuate unfounded assumptions that students from diverse ethnic backgrounds may simply be less interested in volunteering than their White peers.

> Is there generally an interest because that's the other thing, you know, is it because they're just generally not interested, and if they're not why they're not. But we don't know that at the moment. (S4)

Because there was a tendency for staff members to perceive volunteering opportunities to be meritocratic, inclusive, and open to all, the 'blame' of not engaging in volunteering lies

within the individual, rather than the structures and practices in place. This thinking is problematic, because if the issues with structures and practices are not recognised, then institutions are unlikely to evolve and improve.

Reflective Questions for University Staff

What skills and qualities do you value in volunteers? Could these skills and qualities unconsciously discriminate against students from diverse ethnic backgrounds?

Do you require coaching volunteers to have a minimum level of qualifications? Or can you support willing students to achieve their qualifications?

What positive action do you take to recruit volunteers? And develop them while they are part of the club?

How do 'outsiders' experience your club for the first time? Who is responsible for supporting people to feel welcome?

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6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE FOOTBALL VOLUNTEERING

This section outlines the recommendations arising from this research that can be used to inform future volunteer workforce development initiatives. Importantly, we acknowledge that each football club and HE institution is unique in their context, resources, and starting point. We also acknowledge that change and transformation is neither a quick nor easy fix. Therefore, we propose a cyclical model (see Figure 4) in which institutions should aim to develop an equitable and inclusive culture, which priorities diversity.

To promote this culture, clubs and institutions must first assess and develop their current insight and strategies in relation to EDI, before implementing deliberate practices in relation to inspiring, recruiting, supporting, and retaining volunteers. Importantly, this should be an ongoing process of reflection, evaluation, and implementation – making incremental but meaningful changes to ensure leadership and volunteering opportunities are accessible, inclusive, and impactful for a diverse range of students.

Figure 4: Process for Implementing Diversity and Inclusion Changes in Football Volunteering

Table 4 offers some overarching recommendations with some specific, practical examples as to how these could be implemented – importantly, some of these link to clubs and on-the-ground practice, while others refer to the wider university and sport department. These examples are not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather act as illustrative examples of how recommendations can translate to practice. We recognise that each university has local knowledge of good practice in relation to recruiting, developing, and recognising volunteers – our suggestions should be viewed as complementary to this. We advise football clubs and institutions to tailor these recommendations to their own contexts.

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Table 4: Recommendations for Diverse and Inclusive University Football Leadership and Volunteering Programmes

FEATURE OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES	INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERING RECOMMENDATIONS	REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS AND EXAMPLES
STRATEGY – Analyse your club's current situation and create an action plan for enhancing inclusive leadership and volunteering in university football.		
INSIGHT	Analyse your club's current volunteering engagement and experience.	**Who can help you to create an action plan?** • *Establish a group to work together on developing and implementing an inclusive volunteering action plan. This could consist of current club volunteers, Athletic Union representatives, and university staff with responsibility for leadership and volunteering.* **Who are your current players and volunteers? How diverse is your club's membership?** • *Gather insight to understand the demographics of club members and volunteers, ensuring data protection laws and regulations are adhered to. Identify who will be responsible for collecting and analysing this data.* • *Map the demographics of your current player and volunteer base across competitive, intramural, and recreational football offers. To what extent is your membership representative of the wider university student population?* **How inclusive is your club's volunteer experience?** • *Invest in work to understand the lived experiences of current football players and volunteers. This could be through surveys, forums, or discussion groups. Importantly, be clear about how this insight will be followed up and responded to.*
ACTION PLAN	Create an action plan for enhancing inclusive leadership and volunteering in university football.	**What are your club's short, medium, and long-term goals? What changes do you intend to implement?** • *Identify the priority areas you wish to focus on in the short, medium, and long term, with clear key performance indicators (KPIs). Establish your club's long-term vision for*

		inclusive leadership and volunteering and the short-term goals that will enable your club to make progress towards this.
		• Priority areas could be actions designed to support a more diverse group of volunteers into your club, and steps towards making the volunteer experience more inclusive and welcoming. It may be prudent to focus on a couple of things you wish to change to begin with, agree a process, and get started.
		How will you assess if your club's action plan is working? • Be clear about who shares responsibility for delivering the action plan. Find out who in your university can support your club with this work. • Make sure KPIs are specific, measurable, and achievable. Review progress towards these regularly. Remember that changes, particularly cultural changes, take time. Small steps towards inclusivity are important and valuable.
RESPONSIBILITY	Embed responsibility for diversity, equity, and inclusion into the job roles of all paid and volunteer workforce, to support implementation of clubs' action plans.	**How can the university support the development and delivery of football clubs' action plans?** • Ensure the university's strategic commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) translates to on-the-ground support for improving access to volunteering for all underrepresented students, including those from diverse ethnicities. • Regularly review and publish progress towards institutional EDI strategy mandates. • Address gaps in how strategy mandates translate to practice by establishing transparent KPIs for university EDI work and bespoke initiatives to address these. Find ways of capturing the impact of local work to improve diversity in the volunteer workforce, through developing case studies and sharing good practice for example.

What institutional resources are available for improving diversity in football volunteering?

- *Assess and reflect on the resources (financial, human, physical) that are explicitly allocated to improving EDI in your context. Are allocated resources proportional to support the university's strategy mandate and clubs' action plans? How much staff time is allocated to EDI? What funding is provided to support diverse volunteers? What physical spaces are available to help diverse volunteers feel included? (e.g., prayer rooms).*

Who has responsibility for supporting clubs to implement inclusive volunteering action plans?

- *Review all staff job descriptions and role responsibilities – ensure EDI is explicitly mentioned and promoted within them. This can provide role clarity as to how staff in all positions can contribute to supporting diversity work.*
- *Establish accountability by including EDI in regular staff development conversations or performance reviews.*
- *Identify EDI training needs of club volunteers, Athletic Union representatives, and university staff. Provide access to relevant CPD, recognising that one-off workshops may be ineffective. Seek to continually upskill and educate all key stakeholders about diversity and inclusion in volunteering.*

INSPIRE – Take steps to ensure your football club culture is open, diverse, and inclusive. Volunteers feel welcome and inspired to become involved.		
PARTICIPATION OFFER	**Take active steps to welcome new players from different backgrounds**	**How accessible does your club appear to new players from different backgrounds?**

	into your club, to diversify the player and potential volunteer base.	• *Ensure key club information is easily accessible for new players – including contact details for staff and committee members, dates and times of training, location, and directions.* • *Audit the imagery used on official university and social media accounts and consider how representative it is. Reflect on the intended and unintended messages that social media posts may convey. Does your club present itself as open to all?* • *Establish mutually beneficial collaborations between football clubs and other university groups, to meet different people and share information about your club. For example, you could run skill sessions or friendly tournaments and invite members of other clubs, faith groups, or cultural societies.* • *Explore match kit options so that all players can compete comfortably, such as offering university branded sports hijabs – a small change that may help to make Muslim women to feel more welcome.* **Who is responsible for supporting people to feel welcome?** • *Identify committee and staff roles that explicitly include a focus on ensuring new players and volunteers feel welcome.* • *Ensure current student committee members are explicitly trained and supported to understand how important initial experiences are.*
	Offer an initial experience that is welcoming, enjoyable, and respectful of diverse volunteers' needs and preferences.	**How welcoming is your club when new players first attend a session?** • *Who do new players meet when they first attend a session? Recognise that this experience can be intimidating for students who don't see anyone who looks like them.* • *Specifically ask for feedback about the joining process and people's initial experiences of trials, taster days, or as spectators for example. Seek feedback from those that*

		choose to join, and those that do not. Use this insight to review the initial experiences that people have in your club and assess how welcoming they feel to students from diverse backgrounds. **Are all our players' needs and interests considered when planning social events?** • *Current football volunteers in decision making roles should consider all players' and volunteers' cultural and personal backgrounds when planning social programmes.* • *Reflect on how social events are shared through social media, including official and student-led channels, and the perception of your club this promotes. Consider the images and language used, and the frequency and tone of posts.*
RECRUIT – Actively seek to recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds by establishing recruitment practices that are accessible and inclusive.		
ADVERTISING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES	**Produce club information about volunteering opportunities that is accessible and relatable.**	**Does your club advertise volunteer opportunities in ways that will reach and appear welcoming to students from diverse ethnicities?** • *Consider profiling positive images and stories of students from diverse ethnicities engaged in football volunteering to demonstrate that roles are open to students from different backgrounds.* • *Be specific in describing the voluntary positions that the club needs – include job descriptions, time commitments, and the benefits of undertaking the role.* • *State clearly on recruitment advertisements that your club welcomes applications from students from diverse backgrounds. To support this, consider including culturally relevant information to make diverse volunteers feel welcome – for example, explain how fixtures are managed around cultural events.*

PROACTIVE VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT	Actively seek to include students from historically underrepresented groups within football volunteering.	What proactive steps does your club take to recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds? • *Consider a broad range of networks from which to recruit volunteers, recognising the limitations of existing closed networking. Advertise opportunities in different spaces than you have tried previously, such as to university faith groups or cultural societies, or to students from beyond the traditional route of sport related courses. University course staff may be able to share and promote opportunities, particularly for roles that offer opportunities for students to apply the skills they learn through their studies.* • *Who is responsible in your club for promoting opportunities to students in person? Does it tend to always be the same people? Invite diverse players or volunteers to be involved in promoting volunteering opportunities to prospective students, such as at fresher fairs or visiting lectures.* • *Face-to-face approaches are useful for encouraging students from underrepresented groups to apply for roles. Approach or follow up with prospective volunteers personally – this might be an email or an invitation to meet in person. Connections with university course staff may help to highlight potential applicants with relevant skills, knowledge, and experience.*
APPOINTING VOLUNTEERS	Ensure recruitment processes and practices value different skillsets and routes into volunteering.	How can the university's recruitment practices enable diverse students to access volunteering? What skills and qualities are valued in volunteers? • *Recognise how preferences for certain skills and qualities in volunteers may unconsciously favour students from White British backgrounds – for example, communication skills often link to accent. To address this, review current job and role descriptions to assess whether they unconsciously discriminate against students from diverse backgrounds.*

		• *Seek out potential volunteers beyond traditional routes and value attributes over qualifications. Create job descriptions and person specifications for volunteer positions that focus on skills and qualities more so than qualifications. Recognise that there are different ways to demonstrate key competencies such as confidence, and that skills might have been developed in a different context than football.*
	Support students from diverse ethnicities to be represented in decision making roles.	**How inclusive are your club processes for selecting students to fill volunteer positions?** • *Assess how representative current and previous volunteers in decision making roles are (or have been) of the club's membership and wider student population.* • *Reflect on whether volunteer roles are suitable to be appointed through student elections, where social connections tend to outweigh skills and experience.* • *Aim to find out what skills, knowledge, and experience potential volunteers in your club have. Provide peer support for students who have potential to make positive contributions as volunteers.* • *Adapt your social programme to enable students from diverse backgrounds to build social networks through your club.* • *Students possessing relevant skills, but not social connections, may benefit from personal invitations and encouragement to volunteer.*
SUPPORT – Support existing volunteer role models to develop relevant skills, experience, and networks.		
NETWORKING AND MENTORING	**Support diverse volunteers to broaden social networks and access mentoring opportunities.**	**How can clubs support diverse volunteers to expand their networks? What institutional resources are available to help with this?** • *Create internal networking events for volunteers from across sports to meet, learn from, and support one another. One possibility is to set up affinity groups, where people from similar ethnic backgrounds meet regularly to share experiences. Importantly, groups should be supported to contribute to ongoing conversations about the inclusivity*

| | | *of volunteering experiences, and not expected to highlight and solve issues independently.*

• *Establish links with appropriate external partners to support networking – e.g., local county FAs, local clubs, coach development groups.*

Is mentoring actively provided for diverse volunteers, or do individuals have to seek opportunities out?

• *Promote existing formal and informal mentoring initiatives directly to diverse volunteers through individual, personal approaches – do not assume everyone can equally access these opportunities.*

• *Where mentoring opportunities do not exist, create initiatives where mentees and mentors have choice in who they are matched with. A matching process could be based on background, degree course, and other interests; supported by an in-person session as an introduction. Ensure mentees and mentors receive appropriately tailored support to meet their needs. For example, establish a peer mentoring programme, with more experienced volunteers mentoring new volunteers. Create pathways for mentees to develop into mentors over time.* |
| **SKILL DEVELOPMENT** | **Support existing volunteer role models to build relevant skills and experience.** | **How can clubs support diverse volunteers to develop relevant skills and experience? What institutional resources are available to help with this?**

• *Analyse who currently accesses volunteer development initiatives such as CPD workshops, qualifications, or bursaries. Is this group representative of the volunteer workforce and wider student population? Take action if these initiatives appear to benefit some students but not others.* |

		• *Regularly promote internal and external opportunities to volunteers – for example, if the FA are offering bursaries towards coaching qualifications, ensure our volunteers know about it. Consider using personal approaches to directly share these with diverse volunteers.* • *After critically reflecting upon the skills, qualities, and experience that are valued in (and by) volunteers, ensure there are relevant and accessible CPD opportunities for volunteers to develop these. For example, what coaching, officiating, event management, media, or performance support placement opportunities could football clubs facilitate?*
RETAIN – Establish ways to regularly check in with volunteers. **Volunteers stay committed to your football club, and feel valued, supported, and heard.**		
VOLUNTEER VOICE	**Regularly seek and respond to feedback from diverse volunteers, through formal and informal communication.**	**How often does your club seek and respond to feedback from your volunteers?** • *Create formal feedback mechanisms for volunteers to share their experiences, views, and ideas, such as through pre- and post-season surveys. Actively promote this opportunity to all volunteers in your club, particularly to those whose voices have not historically been heard.* • *Check in with volunteers often – start conversations and ask questions. These informal discussions can provide useful feedback too.* • *Remember to follow up and respond to volunteer feedback – ensure it is clear who's job role this is. Start conversations and make changes.* **Can volunteers raise any concerns they have?** • *Ensure volunteers have opportunities and a place to go to discuss microaggressions or racist behaviours that have impacted on them.*

		• *Promote awareness of university reporting mechanisms for volunteers to anonymously report concerns.*
VOLUNTEER PROGRESSION	**Provide volunteers from diverse backgrounds with opportunities to progress within university football.**	**How does your club actively support volunteers' progression?** • *Hold regular developmental conversations with all volunteers.* • *Have a clear pathway for volunteers to progress within the club and take on more responsibility. Make this transparent and accessible so everyone knows what is required to continue to progress.*

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7. NEXT STEPS

In addition to the recommendations for clubs and institutions, there are seven key suggestions for BUCS to ensure that the membership can be supported to develop their approach to enhancing diversity in university football volunteering. These encompass promoting knowledge exchange, allocating resource to support members, and conducting further research to build upon the insight generated from this initial study.

1. Share recommendations produced from this research with the wider BUCS membership. This could include a full copy of the report, a summary of the recommendations, and an invitation to workshops or a conference to share the findings.

2. Identify a pilot member institution to implement the recommendations within their football programme, with a clear plan of how to monitor and evaluate the impact of this initiative.

3. Direct funding and resource to support universities to undertake EDI focused projects. Provide access to critical friends to support institutions through designing and implementing action plans.

4. Create a toolkit to support universities through the process of mapping the demographics of football club members and volunteers, to promote adherence to data protection regulations and good practice in relation to use of language.

5. Design CPD workshops or training modules on EDI that members can implement in their own context, differentiated for club volunteers and university staff, underpinned by current knowledge and research.

6. Create BUCS-led mentoring opportunities and leadership programmes for football volunteers from diverse ethnic backgrounds, to contribute to addressing the lack of access to mentors and networking experienced by students.

7. Invest in further insight to better understand how diverse volunteers can be effectively supported to develop in their roles and contribute longer term to the wider football workforce. This could be accomplished through several ways:
   - Exploring the contribution of mentoring initiatives to diverse student volunteers' development and progression. Students in our research spoke to the importance of this, but to make concrete recommendations for what works, how, and for whom, additional focused research is needed.
   - Tracking the experiences of diverse student volunteers over time, throughout their HE journeys and beyond. This could include following up with students who participated in the student-led focus groups.
   - Examining the inclusivity of the football volunteering experience from an intersectional approach – recognising that race and ethnicity represents one

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marginalised identity in this space, and that gender, age, disability, social
class, and sexual orientation can influence volunteer outcomes.

Our team of co-researchers have gained useful experience in how to generate insight
into their university football leadership and volunteering programmes and may be
well placed to support future research projects.

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